

Possible origin of the reduced ordered moment in iron pnictides: a Dynamical Mean Field Theory study

Hunpyo Lee, Yu-Zhong Zhang, Harald O. Jeschke, and Roser Valenti

*Institut für Theoretische Physik, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt,
Max-von-Laue-Straße 1, 60438 Frankfurt am Main, Germany*

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We investigate the phase diagram of a two-band frustrated Hubbard model in the framework of dynamical mean field theory. While a first-order phase transition occurs from a paramagnetic (PM) metal to an antiferromagnetic (AF) insulator when both bands are equally frustrated, an intermediate AF metallic phase appears in each band at different U_c values if only one of the two bands is frustrated, resulting in continuous orbital-selective phase transitions from PM metal to AF metal and AF metal to AF insulator, regardless of the strength of the Ising Hund's coupling. We argue that our minimal model calculations capture the frustration behavior in the undoped iron-pnictide superconductors as well as local quantum fluctuation effects and that the intermediate phases observed in our results are possibly related to the puzzling AF metallic state with small staggered magnetization observed in these systems as well as to the pseudogap features observed in optical experiments.

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The subtle interplay among magnetism, superconductivity, multiorbital effects and structure is a major subject of debate in the recently discovered iron pnictide superconductors [1]. While, similar to high- T_c cuprate superconductors, magnetically mediated pairing was proposed to dominate the superconducting state [2], the nature of magnetism in undoped iron pnictides is still unclear [3]. The experimentally observed iron ordered moment in the antiferromagnetic phase is too small, compared to that obtained from density functional theory (DFT) calculations. Various DFT studies have shown that this value is strongly dependent on the details of the calculations and on the lattice structure [3, 4]. Very recently, a local density approximation (LDA)+U calculation explained the small magnetic moment in terms of large magnetic multipoles without analyzing the nature of the phase transition [5]. A few alternative proposals are based on a localized picture where a frustrated one-band Heisenberg model is considered [6–9]. However, the multi-band and itinerant nature of iron pnictides are overlooked in such approaches. Furthermore, existing dynamical mean field theory (DMFT) and LDA + DMFT studies [10–14] for iron pnictides were performed in the paramagnetic state and did not consider the magnetic ordering. Therefore, a proper microscopic theory for the magnetism in iron pnictides is still missing.

Analysis of recent Fe 3d transfer integrals obtained from downfolding the bandstructure of a few iron-based superconductors [16] always shows the existence of weakly frustrated (like d_{xy}) and highly frustrated (like d_{yz}/d_{zx}) orbitals for all cases due to the hopping mediated by a pnictogen or chalcogen ion. Such behavior suggests that a minimal model for exploring the role of frustration on the magnetism of the iron pnictides should be a two-band model with one unfrustrated and one frus-

trated band. The question to be posed is whether an AF metallic state with small ordered magnetic moment can emerge out of the interplay between frustrated and unfrustrated bands.

In order to investigate this issue, we consider in the present work a two-band half-filled Hubbard model with different degrees of band frustration. We will demonstrate that while the AF metallic state is absent when both bands are equally frustrated, an AF metallic state with small magnetization is present when the frustration in one of the bands is turned off. Moreover, we identify a pseudogap region and show that it originates from the small AF moment which is due to the interplay between frustrated and unfrustrated bands.

The Hamiltonian we study is

$$H = - \sum_{\langle ij \rangle m\sigma} t_m c_{im\sigma}^\dagger c_{jm\sigma} - \sum_{\langle ij' \rangle m\sigma} t'_m c_{im\sigma}^\dagger c_{j'm\sigma} + U \sum_{im} n_{im\uparrow} n_{im\downarrow} + \sum_{i\sigma\sigma'} (U' - \delta_{\sigma\sigma'} J_z) n_{i1\sigma} n_{i2\sigma'}, \quad (1)$$

where $c_{im\sigma}$ ($c_{im\sigma}^\dagger$) is the annihilation (creation) operator of an electron with spin σ at site i and band m . t_m (t'_m) is the hopping matrix element between site i and nearest-neighbor (NN) site j (next nearest-neighbor (NNN) site j'). $t'_m = 0$ for the unfrustrated band. For simplification, we neglect inter-band hybridizations. U and U' are, respectively, intra-band and inter-band Coulomb interaction integrals and $J_z n_{i1\sigma} n_{i2\sigma}$ is the Ising-type Hund's coupling term. In our calculations we set $U' = \frac{U}{2}$ and $J_z = \frac{U}{4}$ and ignore the spin-flip and pair-hopping processes. For the solution of this model we employ DMFT [17] which includes the local quantum fluctuation effects and we perform the calculations on the Bethe lattice. The DMFT self-consistency equations with inclu-

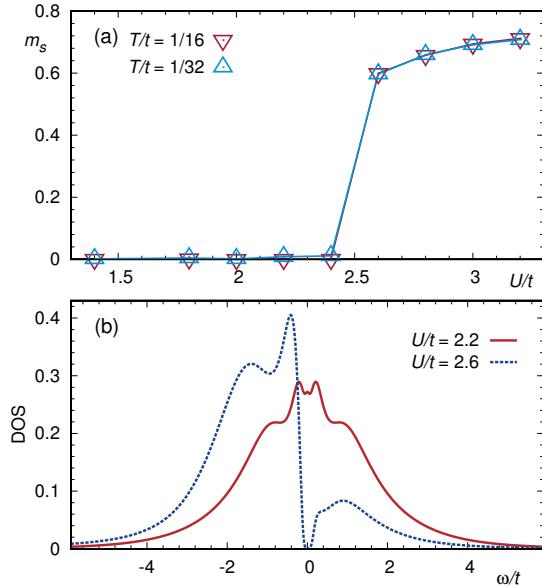


FIG. 1: (a) Staggered magnetization m_s as a function of U/t for $T/t = 1/16$ and $1/32$. A first-order PM to AF transition, recognizable from a jump of m_s , is present at the critical interaction strength $U_c/t = 2.4$. (b) Density of states (DOS) for the spin up species on an A lattice site as a function of frequency for $U/t = 2.2$ and 2.6 and $T/t = 1/32$.

sion of the Néel state are given as [15, 17]

$$G_{0,A,\sigma}^{-1} = i\omega_n + \mu - t_m^2 G_{B,\sigma} - t_m'^2 G_{A,\sigma}, \quad (2)$$

$$G_{0,B,\sigma}^{-1} = i\omega_n + \mu - t_m^2 G_{A,\sigma} - t_m'^2 G_{B,\sigma}, \quad (3)$$

where μ is the chemical potential, ω_n is the Matsubara frequency and magnetizations of A and B sublattices are in opposite directions. As impurity solver, a weak-coupling continuous-time quantum Monte Carlo algorithm was employed [18, 19].

We first consider the two-band Hubbard model with magnetic frustration in both bands at half-filling. Previous DMFT calculations done on the frustrated one-band Hubbard model [15] with frustration strength $t'/t = 0.58$, showed the existence of a first-order phase transition from paramagnetic (PM) metal to AF insulator. For comparison with this one-band case, we set in our two-band model $t_m = 1$ and $t'_m = 0.58$ for $m = 1, 2$. The bandwidth $W = 4.624$ is determined as $W = 4\sqrt{t^2 + t'^2}$.

In Fig. 1 we present the results for the staggered magnetization m_s as a function of U/t for $T/t = 1/16$ and $T/t = 1/32$ (Fig. 1 (a)) and the density of states (DOS) at $U/t = 2.2$ and $U/t = 2.6$ for $T/t = 1/32$ (Fig. 1 (b)). Below $U/t = 2.4$ in Fig. 1 (a) the staggered magnetization for both temperatures is negligibly small, indicating a PM state. As the interaction U/t is increased, for both temperatures a jump is detected around the critical value of $U_c/t = 2.4$ and the system goes into an AF state. The discontinuous behavior suggests a first-order phase transition. These results are very similar to those obtained for

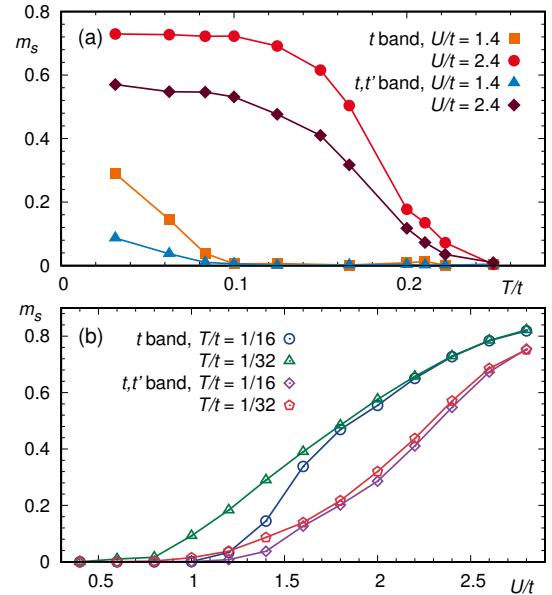


FIG. 2: (a) Staggered magnetization m_s for the unfrustrated band (t band) and the frustrated band (t, t' band) (a) as a function of T/t for $U/t = 1.4$ and 2.4 and (b) as a function of U/t for $T/t = 1/16$ and $1/32$. A continuous transition with a smooth increase of m_s is observed as a function of U/t .

the one-band Hubbard model with frustration [15]. In order to analyze the metal-insulator transition, we present in Fig. 1 (b) the DOS close to the critical U_c/t where we employed the maximum entropy method for analytic continuation. In the PM state at $U/t = 2.2$, the observed finite DOS at the Fermi level ($\omega = 0$) indicates a metal. In the AF state at $U/t = 2.6$, the spin-up and spin-down DOS on the same sublattice become unequal and the spin-up (spin-down) DOS on sublattice A and the spin-down (spin-up) DOS on B are pairwise equal due to the development of the AF moments. Due to the Coulomb interaction strength U/t and the appearance of AF ordering, the system shows insulating behavior with opening of a small gap at the Fermi level ($\omega = 0$). Comparing the results of the magnetically frustrated one-band Hubbard model with the two-band model where an orbital degree of freedom is involved, we find that the phase diagrams of both models are qualitatively the same. Such a model cannot reproduce the magnetic behavior of the Fe pnictides and also should not be relevant for the phase diagram of the Mott insulator V_2O_3 [15, 20].

Now let us consider the two-band system in which frustration is turned off for one of the bands. This model should mimic the observed behavior in downfolding calculations [16] for the Fe pnictides. We set $t_1 = 1$ and $t'_1 = 0$ for the unfrustrated band and $t_2 = 1$ and $t'_2 = 0.65$ for the frustrated one. The bandwidths for unfrustrated and frustrated bands are $W_1 = 4.0$ and $W_2 = 4.77$, respectively. In Fig. 2 (a) we show the behavior of the staggered magnetization m_s as a function of tempera-

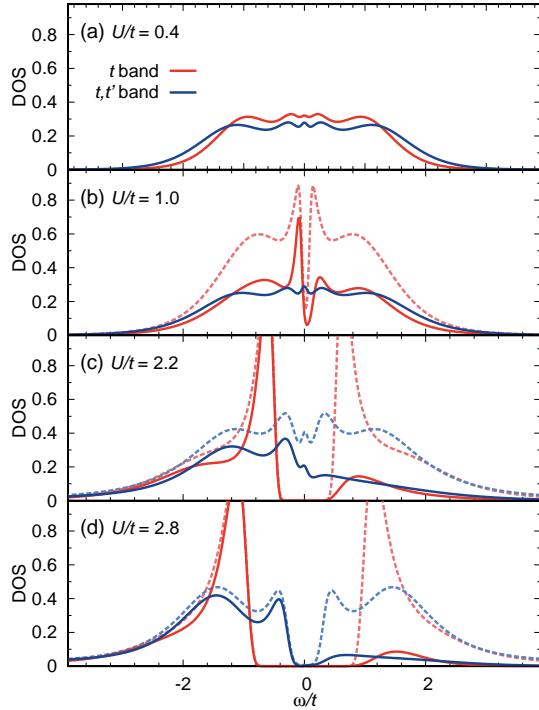


FIG. 3: Spin-up DOS on sublattice A (solid lines) as a function of frequency analyzed at $T/t = 1/32$ for (a) $U/t = 0.4$, (b) $U/t = 1.0$, (c) $U/t = 2.2$ and (d) $U/t = 2.8$. Also shown (dotted lines) is the total spin-up DOS when AF order occurs.

ture T/t for two different interaction strengths U/t . At $U/t = 1.4$ ($U/t = 2.4$), the staggered magnetization $m_s > 0$ for both frustrated and unfrustrated bands is detected as temperature decreases below the Néel temperature around $T_N/t \simeq 0.1$ ($T_N/t \simeq 0.22$) where the system undergoes a PM-AF phase transition. The staggered magnetization increases more rapidly in the unfrustrated band than in the frustrated one. In Fig. 2 (b) we show the staggered magnetization as a function of interaction strength U/t for two temperature values. We find a smooth increase of the magnetization with U/t for both bands and for both temperatures. Unlike the case of magnetic frustration in both bands where a first-order phase transition was observed (Fig. 1 (a)), this smoothly increasing behavior of the staggered magnetization m_s is a strong evidence of the existence of continuous phase transitions. It also suggests the existence of an AF metal where the small staggered magnetization is not sufficient for opening a full gap; this is what we investigate next.

To analyze the metal-to-insulator transition, we present in Fig. 3 the spin-up DOS on the A site for four representative values of U/t at a fixed temperature of $T/t = 1/32$. The PM metallic state in both bands is observed at $U/t = 0.4$ (see Fig. 3 (a)). As the interaction is increased to $U/t = 1.0$ (see Fig. 3 (b)), a magnetic transition occurs where the frustrated band (t, t' band) remains in a PM state while an AF metallic state

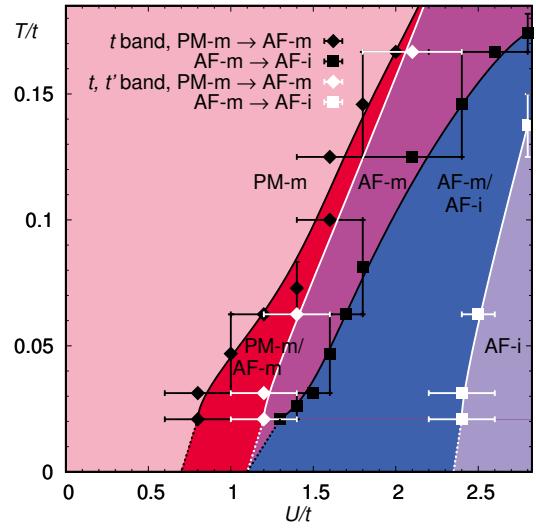


FIG. 4: Magnetic phase diagram for the two-band Hubbard model where an unfrustrated band (t band, $t = 1, t' = 0$) and a frustrated band ((t, t') band, $t = 1, t' = 0.65$) coexist. The phase boundaries' error bars are also shown.

is present in the unfrustrated band (t band). At this value of U/t , the small moment only opens a pseudogap. When we increase the interaction, an orbital selective metal-to-insulator transition occurs, and at $U/t = 2.2$ (see Fig. 3 (c)), an AF metal in the frustrated band co-exists with an AF insulator in the unfrustrated band. Finally, in the strong-coupling region at $U/t = 2.8$ (see Fig. 3 (d)), both bands are in AF insulating states.

In Fig. 4 we plot the phase diagram T/t versus U/t for the Hamiltonian (1). The PM metal, AF metal and AF insulator phases are present in both bands, but the critical values U_c/t of the unfrustrated band are smaller than those of the frustrated one. The Néel temperature increases as a function of U/t . The intermediate AF metals show pseudogap behavior in the DOS as a precursor of gap opening (see e.g. Fig. 3 (b) for the unfrustrated band) due to the continuous phase transitions induced by a continuous change of magnetization (see Fig. 2). This is in contrast to a first-order Mott transition dominated by strong correlations where an abrupt gap opening is observed. The pseudogap features obtained here could account for the experimentally observed optical conductivity behavior of the new Fe-based superconductors [21].

We visualize the mechanism of the appearance of an AF metallic phase with small antiferromagnetic ordered moment in Fig. 5. Without coupling between frustrated and unfrustrated bands, the ground state of the unfrustrated band on a square lattice shows AF insulating behavior with high magnetic ordered moment as soon as the interaction $U > 0$ due to perfect nesting while that of the frustrated band exhibits nonmagnetic metallic behavior below a critical interaction U_c/t as frustration prevents perfect nesting (see Fig. 5 (a)). As the Hund's rule

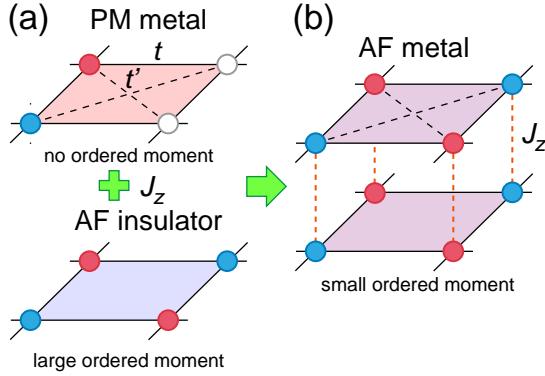


FIG. 5: Schematic picture for the mechanism of the appearance of an AF metal with small ordered moment from the coupling of a frustrated band (PM metal) with an unfrustrated band (AF insulator). The idea is sketched on a square lattice with regard to iron-based superconductors. Red (dark gray) and blue (light gray) sites suggest spin configurations, with white sites representing frustration.

coupling (J_z), which favors ferromagnetic arrangement of spins on the same site, is switched on between these two bands, the spins in the nonmagnetic frustrated band tend to order antiferromagnetically as in the unfrustrated band, and the itinerant electrons have the tendency to localize since hopping between nearest-neighbor sites violates Hund's rule. On the other hand, the spins in the AF unfrustrated band are affected by frustration due to the Hund's coupling to the frustrated band. Therefore, they follow the spin arrangement in the frustrated itinerant band and become more delocalized (see Fig. 5 (b)). Such an interplay between frustrated and unfrustrated bands results in a reduction of the antiferromagnetic ordered moments and therefore of the gap amplitude in the density of states, explaining the additional AF metallic phases (see Fig. 4).

In summary, we have studied the frustrated two-band Hubbard model at half-filling and have shown that a first-order phase transition separating a PM metal from an AF insulator occurs if both bands are equally frustrated. On the other hand, by considering one band frustrated and turning off frustration in the second band, orbital selective continuous phase transitions occur in both bands first from a PM metal to an AF metal and then from an AF metal to an AF insulator. This leads to new phases where either both bands are AF metals, or the frustrated band is an AF metal while the unfrustrated one is still a PM metal, or the frustrated band is already AF insulating while the unfrustrated one is still an AF metal. These new phases may be directly relevant for the magnetism of the new iron-based superconductors where the small ordered magnetic moments observed in the stripe-type antiferromagnetic phase may result from an interplay between frustrated and unfrustrated bands. Furthermore, the pseudogap behavior in the AF metal state is closely

related to the optical conductivity features of iron-based superconductors [21].

The new phases involving AF metallic states appear in a wide range of interaction parameters, indicating that our model can be applied to a large family of iron-based superconductors with different interaction strengths. In the present work we showed the case of one unfrustrated band coupled with one frustrated band with $t'_2/t_2 = 0.65$ but we have checked a few more cases at $T/t = 1/16$ by tuning to stronger frustrations in the frustrated band ($t'_2/t_2 = 0.8$) or even by changing the unfrustrated band to be weakly frustrated ($t'_1/t_1 = 0.2$). In both cases we find solutions of AF metals, underlining the relevance of the investigated model for the new iron-based superconductors. Furthermore, we have checked that AF metallic states also exist at both $J_z = U/8$ and $J_z = 7U/24$ with the constraint of $U = U' + 2J_z$ in addition to the value of $J_z = U/4$ we present in this work. Our model calculations show that it is the coupling of strongly frustrated with weakly frustrated bands which induces a reduced antiferromagnetic ordered moment, and this should be applicable to many (more than two) bands with different degrees of frustration as is the case in the iron pnictides.

While we believe that our model calculations qualitatively capture the central physics of AF metal with small ordered magnetic moment observed experimentally in undoped iron-based superconductors as well as the nature of the phase transitions, further investigations have to be done by including all five Fe 3d orbitals with realistic inter-band, intra-band hybridizations and various fillings on the frustrated square lattice in order to allow for quantitative comparisons between experiments and theory.

Our results on the model with two equally frustrated bands also show that this model is insufficient for explaining the physics of V₂O₃ contrary to previous suggestions [15], and inclusion of other degrees of freedom like phonons may be necessary.

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